

1. ✦

WHAT DOES YOUR PHOTOGRAPHY MEAN TO YOU?

*“Learn from yesterday, live for today and hope for tomorrow.
The important thing is not to stop questioning.”*

— ALBERT EINSTEIN

At the end of my photo workshops, and during my seminars, I often ask the participants a simple question: “What does your photography mean to you?”

I ask the question because I *know* just how important photography is to many people, and I think hearing the answer out loud helps the individual and the others in the room (or around a campfire).

Yes, it’s a simple question, but one that elicits interesting—and often emotional—responses. Why the emotional response, which is sometimes accompanied by teary eyes? Because for many people, including you, photography plays an important—sometimes vital—role in life.

Below is a list of the most common responses I’ve heard. My guess is that you can identify with more than a few because photography truly is the universal language.

Take a look at this list. Read a comment. Stop. Consider if it applies

to you. Visualize a moment in time where you were taking a picture or processing an image where the comment hits home.

Read another comment. Stop and think. Can you relate to the comment?

An escape.

Everything.

Exploring.

Communication.

Convey ideas.

Influence others.

Feel more connected.

A way of seeing more deeply.

My social life.

Play and fun.

Reveal secrets.

A way I write my history.

Love and happiness

A happy accident.

I have no choice.

Freedom.

Owning art.

Back to my roots.

Because of it, I'm living today.

Staying fresh.

Art heals.

I have to see with new eyes every day or else I'm nothing.

I see better when I make art.

Personal evolution.

Living legacy.

Saved my life.

Allows me to be a kid again.

Making money.

In looking through this list, I find "Saved my life" the most striking.

“Allows me to be a kid again” is maybe the most fun. I have heard many variations of these thoughts.

I only heard “Making money” once, so it’s truly not a reason for most photo enthusiasts to make pictures.

Of course, after everyone has shared their comments, I get asked the question, “Rick, what does your photography mean to you?”

I begin by saying that I don’t have a short answer, because my photography is such an important part of my life. I go on to say that it’s easier for me to talk about my camera, as in, “What does your camera mean to you?” However, my comments do, in part, answer the question.

For me, my camera is not simply a box constructed of plastic, electronics, metal, and glass—a box that is ergonomically designed and adorned with dials, buttons, switches, and an LCD monitor.

Rather, I look at my camera as a magic carpet that has transported me to about 100 countries around the world. My guess is that if I did not have a camera/magic carpet, I would have taken far fewer flights around the world. You see, I travel to take pictures and I take pictures to travel, probably like some of you who are reading this book.

My camera is also a license of sorts. It gives me permission to walk up to strangers in strange lands and photograph them (after asking permission, of course). Without a camera, I’d feel naked and awkward, with no valid reason to interact with the person. Here, too, I am sure some of you can relate to this concept.

My camera is also a time machine, capturing precious slices of time that can be relived again and again in my mind and with others. One example: a fall afternoon, when the late-afternoon sunlight was streaming through the trees in our backyard while my 10-year-old son Marco and I played wiffle ball. As my dad used to say, “I would not have missed that for the world.” Today, that photograph is a precious possession. I would not trade it for a brand new Martin D35 guitar, or two. Sound familiar?

My camera, and your camera of course, can also be a “reality maker,”

helping us create our own reality, which I talk about in Chapter 6.

YOUR MISSION:

Ask yourself: "What does your photography mean to you?"